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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006858

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2013

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM PINR KNNP TU

SUBJECT: THE VIEW FROM SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY: PART TWO

REF: A. ANKARA 6163

1B. ANKARA 6140

1C. ANKARA 5566

CLASSIFIED BY W.S. REID III, PO AMCON ADANA, E.O. 12958,  
REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1.(C) SUMMARY: THIS IS THE SECOND OF THREE MESSAGES ABOUT  
THE AMCON ADANA REPORTING TEAM VISIT TO SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY  
FROM SEPTEMBER 14-26. REFTELS REPORT OTHER ASPECTS OF THIS  
TRIP. END SUMMARY.

BITLIS - STRONG ISLAMIC OUTPOST IN THE EAST

12. (C) BITLIS AND ITS MAIN TOWNS HAVE A POLITICALLY ISLAMIC  
POPULACE STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE OF AK PARTY. SEVERAL MAYORS  
CRITICIZED THE U.S. FOR OCCUPYING IRAQ AND ASKED RHETORICALLY  
"IS TURKEY NEXT? WE WILL NOT LET YOU COME HERE!" THE TATVAN  
MAYOR ENGAGED IN A LENGTHY HARANGUE DURING WHICH MORE AND  
MORE MUNICIPAL STAFF KEPT APPEARING IN THE OFFICE IN WHICH HE  
MAINTAINED THAT "THE CIA IS IN LEAGUE WITH BIN LADEN AND  
CONSPIRED TO BRING DOWN THE TWIN TOWERS SO THAT YOU COULD  
ATTACK THE ISLAMIC WORLD. WE WILL RESIST, YOU KNOW." THE  
MAYOR'S ASSERTIONS DETERIORATED FROM THIS POINT ONWARD,  
REFLECTING THE WARPING EFFECT OF THE REGION'S WEAK MEDIA  
CULTURE.

13. (C) OUTSIDE THE MUNICIPAL OFFICES, OUT OF POLICE AND AKP  
CADRE EARSHOT, SEVERAL BUSINESS LEADERS NOTED THEIR CONCERNS  
ABOUT "THE ISLAMIC PROBLEM," ASKING THAT WE KEEP THEIR  
COMMENTS CONFIDENTIAL AS THEY FEARED WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN WERE  
THEIR OPINIONS TO BECOME WIDELY KNOWN. SEVERAL PEOPLE WE MET  
ON THE STREET AND IN BUSINESS LOBBIES ASKED US HOW WE FELT  
ABOUT PKK/KADEK (WE TOLD THEM THAT THE ORGANIZATION IS LISTED  
AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION), ASKED WHY THE U.S. DID NOT STOP  
TURKISH GOVERNMENT "STATE TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE," AND VOICED  
OPPOSITION TO "SPENDING SO MUCH MONEY ON NEW ATTACK  
HELICOPTERS WHEN WE HAVE DEBTS TO PAY ELSEWHERE AND NEED  
SCHOOLS."

VAN - A BREATH OF FRESH AIR OR MORE OF THE SAME ILL TREATMENT?

14. (C) IN VAN, THE TRAVELING TEAM NOTED INCREASED GOT  
SURVEILLANCE AND BLATANT GOT EFFORTS AT INTIMIDATION.  
SEVERAL WHITE VANS OF NON-POLICE ORIGIN SHADOWED THE TEAM  
FROM THE VAN BORDER PROVINCE ONWARD, TOGETHER WITH SEVERAL  
WELL-DRESSED MEN WHOSE PRESENCE MADE THE LOCAL UNIFORMED AND  
NON-UNIFORMED POLICE ANXIOUS. LOCAL UNHCR INTERNATIONAL  
STAFF (STRICTLY PROTECT) SAID SIMILAR MEASURES WERE SOMETIMES  
FOCUSED ON THE UNHCR'S ACTIVITY IN VAN AND AGAINST THE  
IRANIAN CONSULATE IN ERZURUM AND THE "OBVIOUS IRANIAN  
INTELLIGENCE VEHICLES FROM THE (IRANIAN ERZURUM) CONSULATE  
WORKING IN VAN PROPER."

15. (C) PO'S MEETING WITH NEWLY-ARRIVED GOVERNOR HIKMET TAN  
SUGGESTED THAT TAN MIGHT BE A POSSIBLE CONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE  
IN THE SEVERAL COURT CASES BROUGHT BY THE GOT AGAINST VICTOR  
AND KRISTY BEDOIAN, AMCITS OF ARMENIAN HERITAGE. TAN OFFERED  
TO MEET WITH THE BEDOIANS AND TO MOVE QUICKLY TO RE-ISSUE  
THEM A BUSINESS LICENSE AS SOON AS THE CASES INVOLVING THEIR  
EMBEZZLED PROPERTY AND LOST BUSINESS LICENSE CAME TO A  
CONCLUSION ON THE VAN PROVINCE DOCKET. "I WANT TO SEE THE  
RETURN OF AMERICAN AND WESTERN TOURISTS IN NUMBERS TO VAN'S  
GREATER HISTORICAL SITES WHILE I AM HERE" TAN SAID, "AND I  
HOPE THAT CONSULS CAN HELP ME DO THAT." TAN ALSO SAID THAT  
BUILDING LEGITIMATE CROSS-BORDER TRADE WITH IRAN IS A HIGH  
PRIORITY, THAT HE ALREADY HAD MET IRANIAN LOCAL COUNTERPARTS,  
THAT TURKEY WAS CONSIDERING OPENING A ROAD CROSSING IN VAN  
AND THAT THE IRANIANS ARE SERIOUSLY THINKING OF BUILDING A  
ROAD TO THE TURKISH SIDE OF THE EXISTING RAIL CROSSING IN VAN  
PROVINCE. HE SAID THAT HE SEES THE "SUITCASE TRADER MODEL"  
AS THE MOST VIABLE NEAR-TERM BUSINESS MODE FOR  
TURKISH-IRANIAN BORDER TRADE.

16. (C) UNFORTUNATELY, A SIMILAR MEETING WITH VAN SECURITY DIRECTOR TACETTIN KURT SUGGESTED A BREAK IN THE SYSTEMATIC HARASSMENT OF THE BEDOIAN FAMILY MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE AROUND THE CORNER. HE DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY PROBLEMS FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS IN VAN. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT THERE WERE NO HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN HIS POLICE DISTRICT AND "THERE NEVER WILL BE ONE." LOCAL UNHCR (STRICTLY PROTECT) AND BUSINESS CONTACTS SAID THAT KURT IS THE CONTINUING PROBLEM IN THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AND ALLEGED THAT HE WAS INVOLVED IN SMUGGLING AND OTHER ILLEGAL PRACTICES "ALONG WITH THE OLD ANAP LEADERSHIP THAT USED TO RUN THE PROVINCE."

17. (C) ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, KURT EXPRESSED COMMITMENT TO COMBATING ILLICIT MIGRATION, WHICH HE SAID HAD SURPASSED DRUG AND FUEL SMUGGLING AS THE REGION'S BIGGEST PROBLEM. HE SAID THAT RECENT ARRESTS INDICATED STEADY STREAM IRANIAN GOVERNMENT-ORCHESTRATED ILLICIT MIGRATION "MAINLY MOVING AFGHANS, INDIANS, PAKISTANIS AND BANGLADESHIS IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS" (A THOUSAND OR TWO A MONTH) ACROSS THE VAN PROVINCE BORDER. UNHCR CONTACTS (STRICTLY PROTECT) REPORTED SOMALIS, IRAQIS, AND CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICANS IN SMALLER NUMBERS AS WELL. KURT ESTIMATED THAT THE GOING RATE FOR SMUGGLING A PERSON INTO VAN PROVINCE WAS USD 3,000 AND ANOTHER USD 8,000 FOR ONWARD SMUGGLING TO ISTANBUL AND THE BALKANS. THE VAN SECURITY DIRECTOR'S CLAIMS WERE CORROBORATED BY THE BASKALE SUB-GOVERNOR AND HIS SECURITY DIRECTOR, A FORMER TURKISH INTERPOL LIAISON OFFICER WELL-VERSED IN THE PROBLEM AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL DRUG AND HUMAN TRAFFICKERS.

18. (C) A PROMINENT VAN LAWYER SAID THAT THE LOCAL POPULATION STILL WANTED FREEDOM TO BE KURDISH IN EVERYDAY LIFE, FROM NAMING CHILDREN TO GOVERNING THEIR LOCAL AFFAIRS, EVEN THOUGH THEY KNEW THAT THEIR DREAMS OF A "REAL KURDISTAN WERE JUST NOT POSSIBLE GIVEN EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE POLITICAL WORLD OF TODAY. STILL AUTONOMY IS WHAT WE WANT." HE WONDERED WHETHER "AMERICA WOULD STILL STAND WITH US LIKE THEY DID IN IRAQ." PO NOTED THAT THE U.S. POLICY IN IRAQ WAS TO REMOVE HUSSEIN AND NEUTRALIZE WMD THREATS IN THE REGION AND BUILD A DEMOCRATIC IRAQ. PO underscored that the U.S. was not taking sides in Iraq, adding that the U.S. considered PKK/KADEK a terrorist organization. Our contact said that he realized this, but it was too nuanced a position for much of the local population to grasp. "THEY STILL WANT TO SEE THINGS AS YOUR TAKING THE KURDISH SIDE SOMETIMES", HE SAID. HE LAMENTED THAT KURDISH SOCIETY ITSELF WAS NOT CHANGING QUICKLY ENOUGH. TOO MANY KURDS STILL DID NOT CHALLENGE PRACTICES LIKE HONOR KILLINGS, SUBSERVIENT POSITIONS FOR WOMEN, TRIBAL LORD LEADERSHIP, DOWRY REQUIREMENTS, AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES, AND THAT "WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE FOR KURDS TO MODERNIZE LIKE THE WORLD AROUND THEM." HE PRAISED THE GOT'S RECENT EU REFORM PACKAGES AND SAID THAT "THINGS ARE CHANGING SOMEWHAT FOR THE BETTER. WE SEE THAT, BUT PRACTICE IS HOW THESE LAWS WILL REALLY BE JUDGED, AND THERE IS LITTLE TRUST OR TRACK RECORD FOR US TO RELY ON IN LOOKING AT THESE NEW TURKISH LAWS SO FAR."

EDELMAN